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Comments on Concept Paper and TOR for SNIE 56-3-87: Political  
Crisis in the Philippines: Implications for the US

This prospectus covers the ground very well. I would offer one suggestion for adding a level of analysis which, it seems to me, would enhance the value of the estimate. Rather than focusing again on the question of whether Aquino "offers the best chance" for stable, democratic government, I'd suggest that the main thrust be an assessment of the reasons why there has been little significant progress during the last year. This assessment would provide a solid basis for projecting implications for the Philippines and the US.

The central point would be to explain why the Aquino government has not been able to assert sufficient authority or competence to deal with the country's manifold problems. I would propose two premises on which to base the analytic sections: (a) The circumstances surrounding the decline and fall of the Marcos regime left not only a vacuum of political authority but institutional confusion and paralysis which neither Aquino nor any alternative leader could overcome in a relatively brief period of time. The deficiencies of the Aquino government have resulted not primarily from a lack of will or a coherent program but rather from a fundamental dispute over the distribution of authority within the disparate coalition that overthrew Marcos. This dispute has not been resolved by the adoption of a new constitution and the election of a new Congress. The ongoing conflict underlies both the ineffectiveness of Aquino's leadership and the discontent within the officer corps which has generated five coup attempts.

(b) The Philippines is in the midst of a transition to a new political order which will require at least five years to complete and consolidate. Aquino is essentially a transitional figure who cannot be expected to amass the political authority and legitimacy essential for "establishing stability and democracy." Given this state of affairs, complaints in Manila that she has failed to assert adequate leadership or develop clear-cut objectives are largely irrelevant. Aquino has fulfilled her essential functions of presiding over the drafting and adoption of a new constitution and the election of a new Congress. Beyond this, she lacks the organized political support to develop and implement what para. IV of the TOR describes as an "ideal" or "model national agenda." It is not surprising that, except for the Communist Party, "no single individual or group has come forward with a complete and concise national agenda." For the same reason, the next Key Question seems rather abstract, i.e., comparing an "ideal national agenda with the Community's assessment of the capability, resources, and will of Philippine leaders and institutions to implement such an agenda."

In connection with assessing the political and institutional consequences of the unresolved conflict over the distribution of power, it would be most helpful to have a lucid description of the real configuration of Philippine politics. A new model is needed to illuminate the present correlation of forces which underlies the deadlock. The formula in para. III A of the TOR--"centrist forces in the face of polarization between right and left"--strikes me as not very revealing. My suggestion would be to avoid familiar categories of left, right, and center and to emphasize instead conditions of flux, confusion, and the absence of clear political identities and orientations among contending parties and groups during a period of transition. Aquino's winning "ticket" in the congressional elections last May, for example, was composed of a loose coalition of five parties and a clutch of independents. Other players in the political arena include traditional family clans and hundreds of local machines.

This portrait of highly fractionalized political and military establishments would help to underscore how difficult, if not impossible, it will be to develop a national consensus for dealing with the \$28 billion foreign debt and negotiating a formal treaty, required by the new constitution, to replace the military (bases) agreement with the US which expires in 1991. (In view of the constitutional requirement of two-thirds approval, nine Senators would be able to block ratification of a treaty). Moreover, there seems to be little prospect that a leader or party will emerge in the foreseeable future which might be able to impose some order on this political chaos. Aquino's performance in the last 21 months demonstrates that she has neither the inclination nor political skills to undertake this task.

In sum, if the above premises are accepted, the prognosis seems clear: a protracted political deadlock, punctuated by political and labor violence and military plotting, will make the Philippines virtually ungovernable until the confused and erratic transition period ends. Muddling through and avoiding a complete breakdown of public order will represent the optimum outcome in the next few years.

*the optimistic view?*

Projection of the kind of political order that may emerge at the end of the transition probably is beyond the scope of this estimate. Short-term alternatives, however, could be examined. For what little it is worth, I would venture that old-line politicians such as Enrile and Laurel are spent forces--men of the past with no chance of attaining national leadership. I suspect that we don't even know the names of men who will eventually emerge from the congressional arena as plausible candidates for leadership. I would also hazard that Aquino has at least a 50 percent chance of serving out her term (1992), provided General Ramos or his successor and the majority of senior officers remain loyal to the president, or at least refuse to join Col. Monasan or other RAM officers. Aquino will resign only if a profound crisis of confidence and authority materializes, along with a widespread breakdown of public order and a virtual collapse of government functions. The assumption in Manila that an extra-constitutional removal of Aquino would mean a cut-off of American and other foreign aid will continue to be a powerful deterrent to a successful coup.

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